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Letter dated 31 March 2008 from the Permanent Representative of Uzbekistan to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General

I have the honour to convey to you the Tashkent Declaration adopted on conclusions of the International Conference on the Aral Sea crisis and its impact on the gene pool, flora and fauna of the southern Aral Sea region, and international cooperation for mitigating consequences held in Tashkent on 11 and 12 March 2008 (see annex I), as well as the information on the Comprehensive Programme of Action proposed to foreign donors for implementation in order to mitigate consequences of climate change in the Aral Sea basin (see annex II).

I would appreciate it if you could circulate the present letter and its annex as a document of the General Assembly under agenda item 54.

(*Signed*) Alisher Vohidov
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Annex I to the letter dated 31 March 2008 from the Permanent Representative of Uzbekistan to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General

[Original: Russian]

Outcome document

Tashkent Declaration of the International Conference on the problems of the Aral Sea, their impact on the population gene pool and on flora and fauna, and international cooperation to mitigate their consequences

The participants of the International Conference have adopted the following Declaration on the environmental crisis in the Aral Sea region and international cooperation to mitigate its consequences.

1. The outcome of the International Conference has confirmed once again that poor water resource management over the past 50 years, which has given rise to a change in the flow pattern of the Amudarya and Syrdarya rivers, has caused one of the greatest man-made disasters in recent history — the drying-up of the Aral Sea. As a result, a complex set of environmental, socio-economic and demographic problems has arisen in the Aral Sea region, which, in terms of their origin and the scale of the consequences, are of an international and global nature.

2. The danger of a deterioration of the situation in the Aral Sea crisis zone may increase significantly and rapidly if the quantity of water flowing into the Aral Sea decreases further or remains uneven. The glaciers in the Pamir and Tyan-Shan mountain ranges have lost 25 per cent of their ice supply in the past 50 years, and this process is intensifying. Combined with the problem of poor water resources management, this may lead to an expansion of the disaster zone, an increase in the area of salinized land unsuitable for agricultural use and habitation, and a loss of employment and income for millions of inhabitants. It will also result in fresh losses of flora and fauna in the Aral Sea region. Preventing a deterioration of the situation in the Aral Sea region is an integral part of the economic, social, environmental and other aspects of regional security not only for all the States of Central Asia but also for neighbouring countries.

3. In this context, issues relating to the reasonable use of water resources from the region's transboundary rivers acquire particular importance: the approach to the use of water resources, in particular transboundary river water, and decisions in that regard, must be well thought out in the interests of all countries and peoples living in the region.

In accordance with key international legal instruments, including the Convention on the Protection and Use of Transboundary Watercourses and International Lakes (1992) and the Convention on the Law of the Non-navigational Uses of International Watercourses (1997), which establish the basic principles for the use of transboundary rivers, the States of the region must, in their respective territories, strive to ensure that transboundary rivers are used in an equitable and reasonable way and take appropriate measures to prevent the causing of significant harm to other watercourse States.

4. The efforts made by the Governments of the Central Asian States and the international community in the past 15 years have brought a number of positive results which have made it possible to mitigate somewhat the consequences of the Aral Sea crisis for the population, flora and fauna of the disaster zone. However, the scale and intensity of this assistance has decreased significantly in recent years. Kazakhstan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan — the countries primarily affected by the consequences of the disaster — are experiencing substantial difficulties in overcoming the consequences of this major disaster.

5. The Conference participants express their deep gratitude to the Government of the Republic of Uzbekistan and to the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), the World Health Organization (WHO), the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), the United Nations Industrial Development Organization (UNIDO), the World Bank, the Asian Development Bank, the German Society for Technical Cooperation and other international organizations for their new initiatives to identify and develop effective means and mechanisms for mitigating the consequences of the environmental crisis in the Aral Sea region, providing the population with social and economic protection and preserving and restoring biodiversity.

6. The Conference participants draw attention to the need for the strictest parsimony and efficiency in the use of water resources in the region, both as drinking water and for agricultural purposes; the need to prevent unnecessary losses of water in the course of delivery to consumers, including losses caused by the introduction of new irrigation technologies; the need to implement projects for the reconstruction of water supply systems and irrigation networks, the reconstruction of collection and drainage networks and the establishment of new ones, and the technical upgrading of pumping facilities; the need for universal availability of instruments for gauging water use; and the need to enhance the activities of institutions that manage water resources.

7. On the basis of the issues discussed, the Conference participants consider the main priorities of the international community and the Central Asian countries to be the following:

The provision of assistance to the regions in the Aral Sea environmental disaster zone in order to protect the population gene pool, enhance people's health and improve their access to clean drinking water, raise the standard of sanitation and hygiene, reduce the incidence of disease and the child and maternal mortality rates, and improve environmental protection;

The provision of assistance with the sustainable management of transboundary rivers and prevention of an artificial reduction in the volume and flow of transboundary rivers into the Aral Sea, which could exacerbate the environmental situation in the Aral Sea region and the health and living conditions of the millions of people who inhabit the region;

The provision of assistance to the countries of the region which use transboundary river water for drinking and irrigation purposes to help them use those water resources effectively by reducing unnecessary losses, introducing advanced irrigation technologies and taking an integrated approach to water resource management so as to achieve the necessary balance between the need to

preserve and restore the functions of the fragile ecosystem of the Aral Sea region and other needs, including agricultural and industrial needs;

The implementation of measures to curb desertification and soil salinization through the planting of forests, rehabilitation of the waters in the Amudarya delta and other agrotechnical and special measures in the environmental disaster zone;

Creation of the conditions for increased employment and income growth in the environmental disaster zone through the development of small businesses, particularly industrial and agricultural operations requiring little water and service sector businesses, and the enhancement of farming methods, which could improve food supply, increase farmers' income and improve quality.

8. The Conference participants call on international donors and sponsors to consider the Comprehensive Action Programme annexed to the present Declaration, which is being proposed to international organizations, financial institutions, foreign countries and other donors for implementation with a view to mitigating the consequences of climate change in the Aral Sea region.

Annex II to the letter dated 31 March 2008 from the Permanent Representative of Uzbekistan to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General

Information on the Comprehensive Action Programme proposed to foreign donors for implementation with a view to mitigating the consequences of climate change in the Aral Sea region

The Programme includes proposals for the implementation of 101 projects totalling $1,428,730,000.

These include projects in the following areas:

1. **Drinking water supply and development of public utilities — 13 projects totalling $266.6 million**

These projects provide for improved access to clean drinking water for the population of the Aral Sea region by means of reconstruction, expansion and development of water supply systems and networks, water intake facilities, distillation plants, etc., as well as sanitation and the reconstruction and development of sewerage networks.

2. **Improvement of the condition of reclaimed land — 20 projects totalling $483,770,000**

These projects provide for improvement of the condition of reclaimed land in the environmental disaster zone by establishing new collection and drainage networks and reconstructing and expanding existing ones, rehabilitating pumping and irrigation systems, enhancing water management and accounting systems, and restoring the wetlands in the Amudarya river delta.

3. **Enhancement of the health-care system — 20 projects totalling $173.6 million**

These projects provide for assistance to the environmental disaster regions with regard to the improvement of access to health-care services, including medical diagnostic services; the implementation of programmes for early identification and treatment of socially significant diseases among the population of the Aral Sea region; increased provision of resources and equipment to health-care institutions for the treatment of children and of socially significant diseases; and the strengthening of the population gene pool.

4. **Education and science — six projects totalling $18,160,000**

This component includes projects for the development of an environmental culture among students in the Aral Sea region, increased public awareness of environmental problems and support for research institutions carrying out pure and applied scientific research on the problems of the Aral Sea region.

5. **Job creation — 10 projects totalling $70.2 million**

This component includes projects for the provision of social support to enable the population to access microfinance; the development of industrial processing of agricultural products; the development of cattle and poultry farming in remote areas of the Aral Sea region; and the establishment of farms specializing in pond fish

culture, including support for the acquisition of materials for the rearing of highly productive and well-adapted breeds. A number of projects are aimed at large-scale recruitment of temporarily unemployed people for paid work to establish and upgrade protected "green belts" in the desertification area of the Aral Sea region, the establishment of greenhouse farms using energy-saving technologies, and the development of environmental tourism services.

6. **Gender development — two projects totalling $20.0 million**

These projects are aimed at the implementation of a programme of service sector development for unemployed women in the environmental disaster zone and the development of training centres for women entrepreneurs.

7. **Transport infrastructure development — two projects totalling $103 million**

These projects involve the upgrading of individual sections of the Guzar-Bukhara-Nukus-Beineu highway and the upgrading of roads and construction of new roads in the remaining district *khokimiyats*.

8. **Desertification control and environmental protection — 20 projects totalling $49.1 million**

These projects are aimed at the development of a single scientific blueprint for forest reclamation on the dry Aral Sea bed using the latest forest-planting methods; the establishment of protected planted forests, native woody plants and brushwood on the dry Aral Sea bed in degraded desert sand areas; reduction of the impact of domestic wastewater from rural populated areas on the environment; restoration of the environmental sustainability and biological productivity of aquatic ecosystems in the southern Aral Sea region; improvement of social and living conditions for the inhabitants of the Aral Sea region and reduction of environmental pollution; preservation of the unique ecosystems of the Ustyurt plateau in the Republic of Karakalpakstan; introduction of biogas plants for supplying gas to local sparsely populated areas; improvement of the environment and acquisition of highly effective biofertilizers; establishment of a nursery for rare and endangered animal and plant species of the southern Aral Sea region; establishment of protected natural territories encompassing the Sudochye and Zhyltyrbas lakes with a view to including them in the Ramsar List of Wetlands of International Importance; development of a system for managing the wetlands in the Amudarya delta; and stabilization of the water and hydrochemical regime in the lake system in the Syrdarya river basin (modelled on the Aidar-Arnasai lake system).

9. **Development and introduction of alternative energy sources and clean development mechanism (CDM) projects — eight projects totalling $244.3 million**

These include projects for the construction of cogeneration plants, wind-solar power plants for autonomous electricity supply to remote villages and rural hospitals, solar collectors for heating water in rural hospitals, schools and private households, wind generators connected to low-load networks in the energy system supplying remote areas, biogas plants for heat and power generation on farms, and the composting of solid domestic waste.